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Bush at the CIA: mission

impossible?

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WASHINGTON — As the superchief of all U.S. intelligence operations, George Bush has more problems than he can spinle on a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) dagger.

UNDER PRESIDENT FORD'S plan to overhaul the CIA, Bush has the task of developing an integrated espionage establishment out of its rivalrous parts and improving its analytic product for the nation's foreign policy makers, which is the only excuse for having an intelligence community.

But whether Bush can achieve his mission will depend almost totally on how well he walks that slender tightrope between accountability and independence.

There is, for example, what Bush calls his "red wig problem," or how to keep the CIA from doing what it should not do. This means not only keeping the CIA out of the assassination business, hiring Mafia hit men and reading your mail but preventing the agency from being used as a political tool of the White House, as was done for E. Howard Hunt and the Nixon "Plumbers" during the Watergate era.

As director of Central Intelligence,

Bush will have to display firm independence of those in the Pentagon, the State Department and the CIA who assume that dirty tricks will be acceptable once the current fuss blows over. There might even be a time when he will have to talk back to the President.

Yet, the rub is that it was the intelligence community's past independence that let it run wild and get itself involved in all manner of grave misdeeds. That is the reason Mr. Ford has realigned the intelligence structure, making himself more responsible for whatever happens. That is as it should be, and Congress certainly will want to acquire increased oversight responsibility too. Supposedly, this will end the "don't tell me" syndrome that allowed both the President and Congress to plead innocent of past CIA abuses.

Then there is Bush's two-cloak problem. He has been directed to coordinate the intelligence-gathering missions of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the CIA.

This is a 20-year-old recommendation that has never come about because of brass-hat jealousies of the CIA, a pliant Congress and the yen of past intelligence chiefs to devote themselves to the CIA.

To accomplish this, Bush must establish a separate office for his intelligence directorate, physically apart from the CIA and the Pentagon. He must pick a deputy to run the CIA for him on a day to day basis. Will he be able to ride herd on the entire intelligence structure without losing control over the CIA?

Complicating all these problems is Bush himself. He is a novice in the spy business. He served two terms in the House and was Republican national chairman during Watergate. Bush will admit, although Mr. Ford does not, that his brief ambassadorial stints at the UN and in Peking have not exactly qualified him as an expert on intelligence matters. To win Senate confirmation for Bush, the President publicly had to rule Bush out of consideration as his 1976 running mate.

I have a hunch that Bush can turn this liability into an asset. He is a smart, personable man of high integrity, well



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of Richard Nixon during Watergate and kept the Nixon crowd from using the GOP National Committee for its devious purposes. Given the public's vast distrust of the CIA and espionage activities of the past, an outsider's skeptical look at the intelligence establishment may be a plus.

Since he is a political man, Bush will have to bend backwards to avoid any appearance he might tolerate politicizing of the CIA on, say, such crucial matters as the intelligence evaluation of Soviet compliance with the strategic arms agreement. Or whether Mr. Ford can safely pursue a new arms deal with Moscow during the election campaign.

ON THESE HIGHLY IMPORTANT issues and others, Bush must demonstrate that the restructured intelligence community can perform its mission wholly independent of political authorities.

At the same time, he must prove to a skeptical country that the intelligence agencies are now more accountable than ever before to the same authorities. And he must safeguard the secrecy of espionage operations even while expanding the opportunity for whistle-blowing whenever a misdeed is suspected.

George Bush may have signed up for the most impossible job in Washington.